A.C. 189, 83, 87 + Chunlid

To my beloved Brother
be Thrice Illuminated, Thrice
Illustrious and very dear
Hymenaeus Alpha
8°=0.T.O.
(Capt Grady L. McMurtry)
from
+++ Baphomet O.H.C.
(Aleister Crowley)

Used wisely, this book can be
most valuable publicity. It is
the first stroke in a carefully planned
campaign.

Next, O.L.A.

Then Liber ALeph or the Letter "

Then Louis Marlow's version

The Commentary.

from Louis Wilkinson's novel *Forth, Beast!* (1946)

he continued to move about almost as much as he had done in the two years before.

It was in January 1945, during a rather less brief visit of mine than the Cornwall visit of the month before, that Dexter, who was then in Somerset, talked about the Wars. He talked then a good deal about them, particularly about the second War. He was elated by the Russian invasions of Germany; but I had from time to time the sense of some undercurrents of uneasiness in him, and I could not account for this. For most of the time, though, he was in great good spirits, indeed jubilant; for the Russian advance filled him with satisfaction and joy; not only because it promised to finish off the Germans, but because it was such a resounding smack in the face for the Bolshevik-haters and the 'Hun-lovers', as he called them. 'Now if only we don't have a day of National Prayer for continued Russian victories! But *that's* not likely.'

Soon after we met in Somerset Dexter told me that he was anxious that I should make it very clear that he had changed in one respect since his appearance in *Swan's Milk*, which was written before the new German menace became obvious: and in which he was represented as moving towards the Right Wing and as a pacifist, certainly as a pacifist in relation to the 1914–18 War: as he was. 'Well, perhaps I was right,' he said, now in 1945. 'We could hardly have been in a worse case just before the present War if we hadn't come into the last one and if Germany had won it. I felt in my bones,' he said, 'that the last War wasn't going to do any good, and I was determined to keep out of it, as I did. A man fights only for what he lives by, and I didn't see that the destruction of anything that was really valuable to me was going to come out of a victory for the Kaiser.' But he added that he often doubted now if he had been right to feel like this, that he was often inclined to agree with Aleister Crowley who felt sure that he was wrong, and that the

Kaiser's Germany dominating Europe and expanding over colonial territory would have been less disastrous only in degree than Nazi Germany doing the same thing.

'Yes, I *was* wrong!' Dexter said then, sharply and suddenly. 'I haven't any doubt about it at this moment, none whatever. Crowley was right. He went to America and hoodwinked Bernstorff and the rest of them and did all he could to get America in on our side. Why did I say, a moment ago, "Perhaps I was right"?'

He was evidently troubled. I tried to reassure him by emphasizing the justification that he had made for himself. I told him that, considering what those intervening years were like, and considering how near we were to being beaten in 1940, no-one could blame him for those feelings that he had 'in his bones' during the first Great War. I knew, of course, that Dexter had never had such feelings about the War against the Nazis; that, indeed, he had wanted their Government suppressed by force, had wanted a 'preventive war', if necessary, from the earlier Nazi years; not from the earliest, for then he couldn't believe that England wouldn't act if things came near to a danger-point. But, when the danger-point had been unmistakably reached, he urged a preventive war on every possible occasion, even dragging the matter into his lectures and thus incurring a good deal of odium.

I am not saying all this in order to extol the prophetic vision of Dexter, for some thousands of others felt as he did; I do not claim any great distinction, any exceptional sagacity for him in this. He was of a minority, but his thoughts and feelings did not differ materially from those of the thousands who composed it. As he said himself, 'It only means that I wasn't quite a bloody fool when most people were.' He never had any illusions about the emergence, from a second war with Germany, of a new and golden world. 'The point,' he said, 'is that the war is to stop there being a much worse

world than the one we've got, as certainly it will be if the Germans win it—worse than anything that can come of any war.'

I remember his coming back from the south of France where he had been staying with a friend who lived there. I think it was in the early summer of 1935. He was in a state of mingled despair and rage, because his friend had told him that the French were 'scared stiff', but that the Army would probably refuse to march if called upon, and would certainly refuse if Hitler's expected speech were conciliatory, as of course it was at that juncture. But there again, Dexter's rage and depression were not peculiar to him: very many felt as he did, and their feelings continued with increasing exacerbation as the policy of England and France developed. They knew what would come of it: never were there years when it was easier to be a true prophet.

It is not surprising that that particular international situation should have had the effect of swinging Dexter violently back to the Left. It seemed to him obvious that it was the moneyed interests, in England, in France, and in America, that were making Germany's preparations for a war of revenge so easy. They were heavily subsidizing Nazi Germany, with the patent connivance of at least some of their more influential politicians. They wanted to set a strengthened Germany on to Russia in order to destroy a social system by which they felt that their wealth and privileges were threatened; and so they mobilized the forces of those newspapers which their money could control and of a pacifism which was naturally active because of the disillusions following the first Great War. 'No wonder,' said Dexter, 'that Chamberlain was so anxious to be kind to the pacifists in this war. They had been his faithful allies—the real "war-mongers'" allies.' All this is an old story: to Dexter it presented one of the meanest and most repulsive spectacles that history has to show; and it evoked in him all

the latent violence of his nature, all his capacity for hatred. He never pretended that he was not emotionally swayed in the matter. He hated almost all the political leaders of the 'twenties and 'thirties, and I shall not easily forget his delight when Aleister Crowley, at a party in Paris, was asked what he considered the foulest, most disgusting, loathly, and obscene word in the English language, and instantly replied by pronouncing the name of one of the most eminent politicians of that time.

Maugham, later, told Dexter that he considered Chamberlain a leader very well suited to the British people: an observation which Dexter found depressing, though what exactly lay behind it in that acute and disillusioned mind he could not tell. He found it difficult to believe that the notable novelist and playwright shared the sentiments which his brother, Lord Maugham, has expressed in a recent book. To Dexter, Chamberlain represented 'Big Business' at its worst, at its most politically dangerous. 'That moulting hawk', he called him, 'that blinded vulture'. 'I see your bad hawk has taken to the air again,' Llewelyn Powys wrote to him at the time of the Munich negotiations. His friend Denis Morley on his daily walk in Hyde Park used sometimes to pass Chamberlain, and noted, with his usual alertness of observation, the special morbid vanity showing in his face, a vanity visibly affronted by Morley's omission of any deferential recognizing salute as he passed by. 'How right Denis was!' said Dexter, hearing some time later of Chamberlain's reply to one who reminded him of Hitler's broken promises: 'Ah, but he hadn't promised *me*.' 'Baldwin was much worse, though,' he would often say. Dexter felt with reason that there was far less excuse for Baldwin, Germany being so much weaker when he was in power.

Looking back, then, from January 1945, on those years and on the earlier years of the second war, Dexter's exultation ran high. 'Think of Finland!' he said. 'Think of how

ding breakfast at the hotel which he managed. Young Churchill knew little Italian: Dexter, who spoke and understood the language fairly well—he had lived in Siena for a year or so during his first marriage—acted as interpreter. Churchill, determined to give this secular, utilitarian wedding at least some dash of ritual, panache, or 'Churchill touch', took a plate with him and smashed it against the wall at what he considered the appropriate moment. A few years afterwards Dexter, drinking at the Café Royal, found himself literally dazzled by the beauty of a young approaching woman whom he did not recognize when she addressed him, although he said that of course he remembered her. 'You ought to,' she replied, 'you helped to marry me.' The intervening years had changed her beauty by enriching it; she was even lovelier at twenty-three or twenty-four than she had been at twenty.

Remembrance of Angela Churchill, or, as she was at that later meeting, Angela Kinross, started Dexter talking of the beauty of women and of how, in our time, the influence of the films and general standardization were tending to blur and vulgarize that beauty, destroying that 'element of the strange', destroying all that is 'wrought out from within upon the flesh'. 'Soon,' he said, 'only the aristocrats by birth and the aristocrats by nature will have it, and they're getting fewer every day.' I asked him who were the most beautiful women he had ever known or met, and he said Angela Churchill and Meum Stewart and Oriel Ross, and he told a story about Oriel Ross at a party given by Clifford Bax, when a distinguished literary man sat next to her, paying his homage, making grave and courtly obeisance to her beauty with the utmost gallantry conceivable; but the single stud in the front of his dress-shirt had come away from its buttonhole and he wore no vest underneath, so that, with each gallant inclination towards the lovely lady, the shirt came asunder, disclosing his naked, red, hairy chest. 'I'll never

forget it!' cried Dexter. 'One of the funniest things I've ever seen in my life!'

'Well, what other beautiful women?' I asked him; and he replied, with truth, 'My daughter. Then there's Selena Donovan.' He recalled with pleasure the natural, the completely unvaunting assurance with which Selena would sometimes speak of 'my beauty'. He said that his own wife, Mariana, had certainly phases of real beauty, but that he had been too close to her, had known too well too many of her aspects, known her too much in a from-day-to-day fashion, to be able to focus her. '*Attraction*,' he said, 'is different. I could name many women more attractive than some who have great beauty. Elsa, for instance, of whom you had so much to say in *Swan's Milk*—Selena's sisters, all three of them—Tansy, too, and Myfanwy, and Jenny—oh, and many others. But beauty, that kind of vanquishing beauty, is of course very rare. Well! I'm sure none of those *tradesmen* politicians ever had such a niece by marriage.'

He spoke of the remarkable resemblance, as he considered it, between Winston Churchill and Aleister Crowley, in voice, in intonation, and in appearance. The general impression, he said, of both men was strikingly similar, and if you shut your eyes when Crowley was speaking you might think it was Churchill on the wireless, pursuing an entirely new line of thought. 'But their political standpoints are really much alike, fundamentally,' Dexter asserted; 'and each of them has the same right violence, the same right lack of scruple, the same sort of capacity for contempt and hatred. And they're both of them gentlemen in the same sort of way, not conventional "gentlemen" because they both have so much else mixed up with their breeding and their approach to life. Yes! we have to admit it, it's not easy to get on with people who aren't gentlemen.'

'Dexter! What snobbery!'

'Well, I mean people who haven't that *underneath*. Any-

hope she's alive and that she hasn't suffered too abominably. She lived in Berlin. She was almost exactly the same age as Mariana. She wouldn't be much over thirty now. A fair, bright girl—not tall. A certain earnestness. Earnestness and sweetness. I'm still very fond of her.'

'You always are.'

'Of course one always wishes one had done the thing one didn't. I often wish I had got her to come to England. I know she would have if I had convinced her I really wanted it, seriously wanted it, and I could have done that.'

'Even though you didn't seriously want it?'

'I shouldn't have told her it was serious if it wasn't. But it so nearly was. What do you mean, though, exactly? That's a point of some interest. Why didn't I tell her I wanted her desperately and she must come—that when she said as she sometimes did in those later letters, "You don't love me, I know it isn't really *love*," she was quite wrong, although I knew she was quite right? I could have convinced her—it's easy to make anyone believe what they want to believe. Why didn't I write so as to get her for a month or two, and then *end* it? There would be heaps of ways of doing that—why the moral scruple? I didn't think of it as a moral scruple, though. It's true I should have been very glad of her for a few months, it would have been full of interest.'

'Perhaps you didn't want the trouble of getting her off your hands? Perhaps you thought it wasn't worth it?'

'Well. Put it down to that level if you like, but I don't think it would be any truer than it would be to say that I nobly refrained from self-gratification because I knew it would hurt her. It wasn't either, not really. This telling the truth about oneself!' Dexter looked rather worried. 'Of course I knew it might be a nuisance, but I knew I could prevent it from being, when the time came, by simply *cutting off*. Only I knew, too, that I should be going against my nature if I did, that I'm not the sort of man for that kind of

thing, the sort to "harden all within and petrify the feeling". I couldn't make myself do things like that without blunting the sensitiveness—yes, the sensuality, too—the sensual perceptiveness that I live in; so it would really be a mortal wound to me to do anything of the kind, or perhaps even to try to. "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law!" Which means, I take it, never go against the motive will of your nature. But look here——'

He had been talking very rapidly, now he stopped dead, and again we walked in silence for a minute or so.

'It's about the war,' he said then. 'It's what I've had in mind to talk to you about. If I'm to appear in your book as the great truth-teller, I must try to tell the truth about this. But, you see, I don't know it! That's what rather troubles me. You see—as for the simplification of it—what would thousands of people think of me for standing outside the last war and being so passionately convinced a believer in this one? Of course they'd say I was of military age in the last war, that I saved my skin by persuading myself that it wasn't a war worth fighting in and by going off to America where I was safe; they'd say that saving my skin was the real motive, proved the real one because, so soon as another war came and found me above military age, I was all for *that* war, all for it up to the last limit of Vansittartism!'

'No-one who really knows you would think that the explanation.'

'But I'm not sure. I do think there's something in it. It's such a tremendously powerful motive, self-preservation, particularly for anyone who is as I was in 1914—young, strong, free of the usual kind of fettering job, enjoying the work I did and enjoying everything else I did, and with thirty or forty or fifty years ahead of me to go on doing it.'

'I don't see,' I said, 'why you should worry about your behaviour in the last war. Almost anyone in your position and of your temperament would have done the same. And

kind of expenditure in which so many rich or even moderately well-to-do men find their pleasure. He disliked keeping up any sort of an 'establishment', he had no taste for a house or servants, and this was lucky for him in the war years when houses became more and more difficult to keep going, with servants scarce or unobtainable. The 'tyranny of the home' was, to Dexter, thrown into so glaring a light during the war that he wondered how anyone could continue to tolerate it. He always found it rather hard to understand love of home in others: I remember his reading to me from one of Joanna's letters in which she said that in the house she shared with friends in London she was now beginning to feel that she had 'a family, a background, and a home'. 'God!' he said. 'Isn't that awful?'

He spoke then of Selena Donovan with her life so often obstructed and hampered by her three young children; of his daughter with her baby of less than a year; both of these young women enslaved by 'home duties' from which they could find little relief in paid service—sometimes, indeed, none at all. He quoted with satisfaction Aleister Crowley's description of the Family as 'Public Enemy Number One'. Now it was almost everyone's enemy; whereas formerly it was the enemy only of the poorer classes who were then so well used to slavery, so incapable, from that long use, of cultivating any margins to their lives, that they submitted and were mute. But, even if Dexter had had a home full of trained servants provided free of charge, I am sure he would not have taken much advantage of it; he would still have preferred to rove, and advancing years seemed to make no difference to him in that respect. He continued to move, with the ease of a natural impulse, from one place to another. So long as he could have a room to himself—a bed-sitting-room provided it were not too small and of moderate comfort—that was all that mattered. He could understand by an effort of detachment that his friends should prefer to live in one

place, but he would earnestly pray to be delivered from growing such roots himself.

'There should be service-flats everywhere,' he said, 'mostly furnished, and all equipped with every possible labour-saving device. An unfurnished one, with all your things in it, would be your *pied-à-terre*, your headquarters —oh, I suppose people whose work kept them in one place would have to use it a good deal!—and, if you really did want a family life, you could live there all the time with woman and children, there'd be no law against that.' But he couldn't see how anyone could doubt that the care of children should be a specialized profession, just as the running of a house should be, and 'Everyone thinks so really. As soon as there's money enough, people invariably put their children and the running of their house into other people's hands—that proves it!'

But Dexter did not want to have a house of his own run for him any more than he wanted to run it himself; nor did he want to be expensively dressed, nor even 'well turned out', nor to frequent expensive restaurants, nor to spend a great deal of money otherwise than occasionally and discriminatingly on wine and food; nor did he want to possess motor cars or expensive women. That the rich men are in danger of getting the worst women was one of his strongest convictions. 'No woman who puts money first is ever much good as a lover. Because she doesn't put love-making first. And of course it's the women who put money first who go for the rich men, who lay themselves out to be bought by them, either as wives or as mistresses. They're *no good*. The business-man's Moll!'

Prostitutes, of whatever kind or degree, always chilled Dexter; they made him feel either indifferent or repelled. He always wondered that so many of them could make a living, and he thought it must be either from timid and unenterprising males, generally very young or very old, or

always looked younger than he was, he had of course by that time lost some part of such physical attraction as he had formerly had. He himself said that the explanation of his success was extremely simple, as simple, indeed, as the explanation of a man's success in his work, for it was the same. If a man is interested in his job, then he gets good at it, he succeeds. It is a question of vocation, of really wanting—wanting enough. 'One generally gets what one wants.' Dexter added that of course there was a certain amount of trickery that you were bound to learn; you had sometimes to affect indifference, to pretend to be casual; but there was very little in it really, only a moderate amount of ordinary cunning.

Dexter also said that male competition in England was not very serious, especially during the inter-war period when there were so many neuters about, or men who behaved like neuters; and so many bunglers. Girls were always telling him what bad lovers, both first and last, the young men of the day were. 'And now,' one disconsolate wife confided, 'he doesn't even try.' I would certainly say that one reason for Dexter's success is that he has never been so stupid sexually as most Anglo-Saxons are. And, when he said that the real secret of the matter was force of will towards that end, I feel that he should have added—though perhaps he did not like to seem to brag—that such force of will derives from potency, which is, therefore, what should be reckoned as the 'first cause'. Dexter would not have found it necessary, even if he had found it expedient, to be generous with money as well.

It was, then, certain essential features of Dexter's nature that made him immune from many of the usual depredations upon income and kept him financially stable. The 'bourgeois virtue' of such stability was of course sneered at by some of his acquaintances, particularly by those who wanted to borrow money from him and found that they

couldn't; but it was valued by some of his friends. John Powys referred with satisfaction to Dexter's 'sparing hand': he spoke feelingly of the agreeable relief that it was to him to be quite sure that Dexter would never want to borrow money.

Considering the striking inconvenience of debt and of financial insecurity in general, Dexter was always rather surprised by spendthrift habits in people who had any money as a barrier between them and inconvenience of such a kind. Such spendthrifts must, he thought, generally lack imagination, though not always. Among his own friends there was the case of Maurice Browne, a man notably imaginative, though perhaps deficient in imagination of the realistic sort. In the height of Maurice's triumphant *réclame* from *Journey's End*, Dexter and Jack Squire and Ralph Straus dined with him, and, knowing him well, they of one accord most solemnly adjured him to put aside at least a few thousands of the many that were flung up to him from so full a tide. But, to Maurice, the exciting lure of theatrical adventure was stronger than any prudence, it was a passion against which nothing could avail. Before very long all those thousands had melted, all but a few flakes of them.

'Like Aleister Crowley,' said Dexter. 'There's nothing like these passionate richly coloured imaginative manias for beggaring a man. They get rid of money far more quickly than anything else can—any mere luxuries. There wouldn't be much point in my having a lot of money,' he said. 'It would bore me to be the usual kind of spendthrift, and I haven't any passionate manias. However much money I had, I shouldn't spend much more than I do now, it would be too much trouble.'

'You'd have to do something with it,' I told him.

'Why? I could just leave it in the Bank and not bother and never look at my passbook again. But I don't think I should

do that. I should make a list of my friends and divide it among them. How amusing! Portioning it out. Some would get a lot more than others. "Money's like muck, the more it's spread the better." How true that is! Aleister certainly spread his money out. Now he really *is* generous, he always puts me to shame. You know he had a large fortune when he was a young man—I think a hundred thousand at least—and he threw every one of those singular passionate intensities of his into spending it all. He treated his fortune as a toy. Of course if, like Aleister, you fit out mountaineering expeditions and are continually printing sumptuous private editions of your poems and plays and magical works, and buying places in Scotland, and living everywhere like a prince and entertaining like a Maharajah, a hundred thousand pounds won't last very long. But what *panache*, what *élan*, *brio* and all the rest of it while it does last! I can understand that kind of spending, there's no lack of imagination there, there's a sublime faith. Aleister was justified of his faith, too. I didn't know him when he had all those thousands, I knew him after they had all gone, but he always seemed to live like a rich man, he always managed that somehow. Except once. About ten years ago, I think that was, when I found him living in Paddington Green in some frightful lodging. I can't think how that happened. Very likely it wasn't poverty at all, but some entirely different reason. He spent a great deal of money for his magic, for his religion; he may have lived in Paddington Green for the sake of his religion. Anyhow, his craziest actions are based on the coldest logic, and he gave no impression of poverty, quite the reverse. After the first minute or two, his background didn't exist. There was incense burning, I remember; of course that may have helped. The Paddington Green interlude didn't last long; very soon it was Piccadilly and Jermyn Street again. Aleister *ought* to have money, he's the right sort of man to have it, hardly anyone has it who ought to—yes, most people who

have it are the wrong sort altogether—utterly the wrong sort, almost all of them! That's one thing I like about the way the Russian Revolution seems to have worked out. They haven't got equality of income, which would be appallingly dull, but their State ownership really does seem to have prevented the worst wrong sort of people from getting too much money, it has drawn the teeth from the private-ownership sharks, at any rate. And the artists, the writers, the actors and singers—the kind of people who ought to have money—the entertainers—people like myself, in fact—from all we hear they get quite a lot of money now in Russia.'

'If one hasn't been in Russia,' I began warningly.

'Yes, I know. But I do know people who know Russia.'

'How about the Commissars?' I said. 'They do pretty well, one's told. I wonder if they're always the right people to have money?'

'Very likely not. I dare say a lot of fault could be found with the Russian system, but the point is, Are its faults worse than ours? You can't condemn it because it isn't ideal—as though it were a choice between it and an ideal system. The "system" we've got is one by which profit rots everything for everyone except for the well-to-do. These giant-tradesmen with their endless varieties of shoddy! They feed us with shoddy, they've rotted our teeth and our guts for the last two or three generations! They call up all the world to be taxed and poisoned! It's time it was stopped. The Liberals want to patch a shoe that has gone beyond repair. "Too fur gone," as a cobbler said the other day of one of mine. When Llewelyn was about twenty, he said to me, "I can't imagine any honest man not being a socialist," and how right he was! It's not a choice between socialism and a system that gives privilege and power to people who have a tradition and know how to live——'

'But, Dexter!' I demurred. 'All aristocracies were founded by people without tradition, people whose only idea

of living was grabbing. Then they changed with the generations, they grew up.'

'Ha!' he cried, 'that's just it. These people *won't* change, they *won't* grow up. All the conditions are different, it won't be the same. No, we had much better have socialism. On the whole I'm sure they handle money in Russia better than we do—better than it's handled anywhere else, in fact. Do you think that all our profit-makers would hate them so much if they didn't? That's evidence enough, proof enough. All the worst people hate the Bolshies. I was staying in the house of a very rich American when the news came that the Russian Banks had been nationalized. My host's jaw dropped when he heard it. He couldn't speak for a moment, then he said, in the tone of a sick child, "They'll get in bad if they do that." So I was sure they had got in very well, and I'm still sure! Of course the disappearance of prostitution under Bolshevism weighed absolutely nothing in Christian eyes against the nationalization of the Banks!'

Dexter had, it was clear, undergone full re-conversion. When he was veering towards the 'Right', it was towards a 'Right' of his own, a 'Dexter-Right', which he soon saw was unattainable. 'Tell me more about Crowley,' I said, when he had come to the end of his peroration.

'I've just had a letter from my son Oliver about him,' said Dexter, complying. 'He's living at Hastings now, and so is Oliver, who, I'm glad to say, appreciates him. He writes enthusiastically of his "caressing charm", his "careless wit". He went to tea at my son's cottage last Tuesday, wearing breeches with eighteenth-century silver buckles, an enormous green scarf, a Chinese beard, and heavy seals with Tarot devices. Oliver considers him "a very dangerous man", he says their cat and dog swooned before him, but I gather that they swooned for joy. Perhaps he is "dangerous", I don't know, most people seem to think so, but I've no reason to suppose it, though I hope it's true. He's certainly

far-sighted. Do you know, he's got a Five-Thousand-Year-Plan for civilizing America? Not only far-sighted, but sanguine.'

'Do you *like* Crowley?' I asked. 'Of course I know that you've always been greatly interested in him and enjoyed his wit and his humour and his mind and perhaps most of all his strangeness, but it's difficult, when one thinks of his reputation, to imagine anyone really *liking* him.'

'You mean his reputation as something monstrous and inhuman? But of course that's all rubbish. Or I expect it's just one of Aleister's jokes to have got himself that reputation. Of course I like him. Lots of people like him. I've a great affection for him, and have had for more than thirty years.'

'How about his magic? After all, that's what he's chiefly known for.'

'I know nothing about it,' said Dexter decisively. 'I can't understand a word of it. So I think he ought to be chiefly known for his poetry. I know he's a poet, and so do some others of whom there'll be a great many more when he's dead. A lyrical and erotic poet as well as a mystical and religious one—and then there's his poetic invective, and humour. Yes, I like Aleister's jokes, those deflating ripostes of his.'

'By word of mouth, too, do you mean?'

'Yes, of course. When Theodore Dreiser, after protesting earnestly and at length against the dependence of American Letters upon English tradition, asked him, "What have *you* to offer us?" Aleister replied with the single word "Patronage". I still remember Dreiser's rage, it was wonderful. And how characteristic, that reply of Aleister's when he was asked some forty years ago how one could sleep in Russia without being pestered by bed-bugs: "Shift the frontier". That was so completely *his own* joke, in his own special grand manner, with his own gesture's special sweep. It was almost

a religious joke because of its half-in-earnest indication of faith in the impossible. It was a large, fantastic, extravagant joke, all of a piece with his behaviour to money. Oh, and those six words in his play *Household Gods*—"A boy? Then what am I?" That's one of the most humorous exclamations in literature.'

'Surely,' I said, 'Crowley can't "behave to money" now as he used to?'

'No. But his *attitude* is still just the same. I told him the other day that I couldn't get a diary, not one large enough; and he said that was easy, he always had his made for him since the war-time diary shortage and it cost only about five pounds. Imagine me giving five pounds for a diary! But he really seemed to think I would. The diary he showed me certainly was superb. He still thinks like a rich man, you see, and I expect he can't think like that really convincingly unless he thinks all his friends are rich too. Well, if I ever do come into that huge fortune we were imagining, I shall leave myself enough to buy a few things like that five-pound diary.'

I asked Dexter if he thought there was anything in the comparison that has sometimes been made between Crowley and William Beckford.

'Not much,' he said. 'That Fonthill Abbey ass! He certainly made a show with his money, but he was more than a bit of a fake, a pseudo-romantic, a frightfully sentimental sensationalist, and a very amateur occultist. He had no power really, none in himself, as Aleister has; it was all his money and his social position, working in with his oddity and his conceit. You can't think much of him. He was extravagant, but not in Aleister's way, not with that complete disinterestedness and unworldiness, not with that passion and power, no, nothing like. Beckford, as might have been expected, died a rich man, for all his little indiscretions—unquestionably rich.'

'What about Tommy Earp?' I asked. 'What do you make of the way he threw his fortune out of the window?'

'Nothing but good,' Dexter replied instantly. 'I make nothing but good of it. I didn't know Tommy then and I can only guess at why he treated his money like that—I can guess from what I knew of him afterwards. I think his money was a toy to him, too, but not as Aleister's was. Partly because he had a good deal less, so it was a much smaller toy, only fit to be broken quickly. It was more fun to do that with it and less trouble and more derisory. I think Tommy entertained as he did in Paris and gave money away as he did partly out of his extraordinary natural benevolence and partly as a gesture of contempt for money—one of his calm, indifferent, critical, clear gestures. It had nothing whatever to do with the ordinary sort of weak, unimaginative spending, of course it hadn't. It couldn't have been like that with Tommy. How absolutely unlike anyone else he is, in every particular! What an *individual*! Brought up without parents, that's one reason. I admire him, I admire all three of them —Maurice and Aleister and Tommy—for the way they've behaved with money. Thank God there are a few who can treat money like that, I never could, no, never! It's either in your blood-stream or it isn't.'

I remember that Dexter speculated, on this occasion, on the difference it might have made to him if his uncle had held on to the family property, which was the site on which the Ritz Hotel now stands, instead of selling it to Lord Walsingham early in the century at about a tenth of the price that it would have fetched after the 1914 War. 'I should have been quite a rich man,' he said. 'Just too rich, I expect. The money might have been just enough to corrupt me—to enslave me with false values—I don't know! But I think they might at least give me free meals there, as things are. Yes, it's a complicated, subtle, deceptive matter, what money can do to you.

'I don't know at all,' he said again, musingly, and then he said that nearly all the rich men he knew had been mutilated by their wealth in one way or another, so perhaps Tommy Earp and Aleister Crowley and Maurice Browne were instinctively safeguarding themselves against mutilation. But in that case their instinct would have been wrong, for if you had work or even interests that you lived in and that were your reason for being, then you didn't need that kind of safeguarding. Maugham, writing his novels and plays, couldn't be mutilated by his wealth.

'But,' Dexter added, 'I've always thought he over-valued money. His remark that money is a sixth sense without which you can't make full use of the other five, well, that's very much a half-truth. Money is often something that prevents you from making full use, or indeed any real use of your senses. You can make full use of them, a peculiarly sharpened use, without any money at all.' He returned then to one of his favourite prejudices and declared that Shaw was far more shallow and fallacious—'as you'd expect'—with his dictum that the lack of money is the root of all evil. 'One man's lack of money,' said Dexter, 'generally comes from another man's love of money, so you don't get any further, you only just twist about, by saying "lack of" instead of "love of". And love of money is the cause not only of lack of money but of a lot of other evils, so Shaw just switches attention from the whole of the matter to a part of the matter, that's all he does. Samuel Johnson—there's another teller of half—or quarter—truths about money, so is Samuel Butler. "No-one but a blockhead ever wrote except for money," what a silly thing to say! And Butler with his pronouncement that if ever he heard of a young man coming into money he was only sorry that he hadn't come into twice as much. The silly things these clever people say! The old fossil in the club-room arm-chair, with his "Worst thing that could have happened to the young feller", is right nine times where Butler

is right only once. If you've got work or interests that you can live in, then it's all to the good to have some money, you're freer—but you don't need much.'

Dexter stopped to take a drink, and then, 'Just think, though!' he exclaimed. 'Just think of those men at the office! *They* don't live in their work; their only life, such as it was, was outside it, their work was only a means to the end of money-getting, and just think of *them*!'

He provoked a gorgeous lampoon from Aleister, though; that's something. A patchy snob, then; let's say I'm that. I certainly am offended by snobbery that gives harmless people pain. Once I heard someone jeering at a girl because she had called King Edward "Sire", and that made me furious. There can be a lot of unkindness and rudeness in snobbery, some of the gentry have their full share.'

'How about that definition of a gentleman,' I said, 'as a man who is never rude unintentionally?'

'A bad, narrow definition. Redwood Anderson said it was probably made up by some tweeded "county" person and I expect he's right. One can be "rude" from absentmindedness, or from concentration. But that kind of "county" person would be incapable of really concentrating on anything, and would be abundantly capable of gross deliberate rudeness which he'd think was classy.'

'I'm more and more inclined to doubt, Dexter, if your snobbishness is the genuine article.'

'Well, I admitted it was patchy. Anyhow, I'm not an inverted snob, and that's the worst kind. They really are most trying; talking as though it were something admirable *not* to be of the gentry, boasting of their friends in the lower ranks. Edith Sitwell is quite right to protest against this fashionable "democratic boot-licking". What I feel,' said Dexter, 'is that, taken simply as a person of his or her class, anyone of any class is dull and rather unpleasant. I've never liked people who are obscured by their class characteristics. That generally means that they haven't got much to be obscured. All the same, class characteristics *are* of interest.'

Dexter then told me that among his own relations there were some who were of 'better' and some who were of 'worse' stock than he was, because there had been some prominently 'good' and some prominently 'bad' marriages in various branches of his family. He said that he found it extremely interesting to see himself as it were 'aristo-

cratized' or 'bourgeoisized' or 'protelarianized' in the persons of these various kinsmen; and that he had sometimes gone to considerable trouble to meet such of them as were strangers for the sake of that particular interest: to find out how much more or how much less 'gentlemen' they were than himself.

There is no doubt that Dexter was often preoccupied by the interest of the various characteristics of class distinctions. Details of formal distinctions of rank interested him too. He knew all about our complicated English system of titles and courtesy titles, and was irritated by ignorance or neglect of the correct form or ritual in such matters; as, for instance, by the addressing, on an envelope, of a baron's wife as 'Lady Blank', and not as 'The Lady Blank'. This was partly, I think, due to the strong strain of precision in Dexter. He liked clear indications; and, without that 'The', she might have been a knight's wife or a baronet's.

He would take a great deal of pains to clarify the lines of precision or of inaccuracy. He once copied the weather forecasts day by day for a whole month, setting down on the following day, in a parallel column, an account of what the weather really was. Then, at the end of the month, he cut out each daily weather forecast and put the little pieces of paper into a bowl, shuffling them thoroughly. The first forecast that he took at haphazard from the bowl he assigned to the first day of the month, the second to the second, and so on; and he found that this purely fortuitous method gave a result considerably less inaccurate on the whole than the original forecasts had given. Then he shuffled his own reports of what the weather really had been, assigning them in the same way, and found that, by that method too, he got nearer to the actual facts than he could by official prediction. When the 1939–45 War was over, and the weather forecasts appeared again, he said it was nice to have that familiar comic relief back in the newspapers.

other man's master"? "Good" enough! That isn't the point. The point is that not having any masters doesn't work. As they very soon found out after the Revolution in Russia.

'Well!' Dexter took a cigarette and leaned further back in his chair. 'That's enough about literature for your book. No, *not* a whole chapter!'

CHAPTER X

WINE AND FOOD

When I said that Dexter would eat anything except white bread, I should have also excepted junket and marzipan and chewing-gum and plantains. I think that completes the list. About plantains, that is 'Jamaica bananas', or 'pseudo-bananas' as he called them, meaning by that what were in the inter-war period almost the only bananas obtainable in Great Britain, he was hardly less bitter than he was about white bread. He thought they tasted like soap. But the 'real bananas', Canary bananas, he had always highly esteemed.

He could not drink cold milk—that was the only drink that upset his digestion—and he would not drink strong tea or temperance beverages, so whether they would have given him indigestion I don't know. They would certainly have given him some vexation of spirit. He did not often drink whisky, but that was because he thought poorly of most current whiskys: he enjoyed good whisky when he could get it, as he did when he was Aleister Crowley's guest. Also he enjoyed Crowley's vodka, and Crowley's '65 and '75 brandy; but he was never at all addicted to spirits. Old brandy was the only spirit of which he spoke with high enthusiasm: once, when he was staying at Cap Ferrat, his host had to go out to dinner and left Dexter alone with a bottle of '75 brandy. That was a bottle he never forgot. He was rather drunk, he said, agreeably drunk, by the time his host re-

One morning at Vintners' Hall, at a port-tasting function of the Wine and Food Society, Dexter met a stranger who thought as he did about old champagne. The stranger, delighted to find anyone who agreed with him on this matter, invited Dexter to share a bottle of his Perrier Jouet then aged thirty. They met for dinner a few days later at a small Soho restaurant, where Dexter found his stranger with the bottle by his side. That was another of his wine-drinking occasions that stood out in his memory; as did the occasions, the more notable because they happened during the Second War, when he drank some rare Burgundies and ports from the cellar of a new friend living in Dorset, and some old champagne as well. He remembered, too, as oases, Burgundies that he drank during that hampered period with Aleister Crowley; a lovely Liebfraumilch in Somerset when he and Maurice Browne were the guests of Arthur Calvert; in Devon, a particularly fine port, both generous and delicate, which he owed to the hospitality of the biographer Malcolm Elwin who was then writing his biography of Dexter's great friend, Llewelyn Powys; and, in Dorset, veritable mead, of an almost vanished tradition, made by Llewelyn's sister Gertrude.

It was a mistaken idea, so he always maintained, that women had no taste in wine. His experience was that their palates could be quite as discriminating as men's. G. B. Stern and Enid Starkie were two women whose feeling for wine Dexter believed to be as keen and as delicate as any man's could be; so was Jocasta's; and he told me that women had again and again complained to him of the insulting male supposition from which they had so often suffered, that 'sweet wines are what the ladies like'—the sweet white wines such as Graves and Sauternes. G. B. Stern had given him some of the best dry sherry he had ever drunk, and Enid Starkie, even during the Second War, some of the best of ports and Burgundies. He had often drunk admirable wines, German

and French, with his old friend Ethel Mannin when she was his hostess.

Since that port-tasting function at Vintners' Hall Dexter was convinced that, of comparatively recent years, 1912 was the best port year. He told Crowley so, and Crowley, behaving like himself, gave him a 1912 Martinez for his sixty-third birthday in December 1944. Such a present at such a date! Dexter was deeply moved. The oldest port that Dexter had ever tasted was from the cellar of his Suffolk friend Wilfred Vail. About a dozen bottles had been overlooked by Vail's father; Dexter thought there had been some subsidence in the corner where they were. Nearly half of them were undrinkable, but some of the survivors were superb, although their fortifying brandy came through too palpably. Two or three bottles were amiable, but infirm. The wine could not have been of a later date than 1850: Dexter hoped that it was of the famous 1848 vintage. It was pale, and the strained deposit was like thick mud.

Dexter would admit, when pressed, that red Burgundy was his favourite wine; but he would deprecate invidious discrimination. 'Each has its special virtue,' he would say, and he would then extol with eloquence the distinguishing virtues of a young Moselle, of white and of red Burgundy, of Rhine wines, of Haut Brion, of champagne, of port. But it has always seemed to me that such eloquence should come from the mouth, and should be companioned by the sight and the smell and the taste of wine. Not the printed page, but the wine itself should be there as the words are for the first time spoken. The wine should drop like dew upon the words as they enhance it.

Another wine-memory of Dexter's, a very different one, is of a curiosity in wine, a bizarre curiosity. This wine bore a late eighteenth-century date on its seal, and was Malmsey. It was a gift to Dexter from the cellar of the same Dorset friend whose ports and Burgundies were so notable; and

Dexter drank it in 1942 with Theodore Powys at Mappowder. John Powys was there too, and he declared that it was the only wine that he had ever really enjoyed. Dexter described it as of an unknown richness and sweetness and potency. 'It was very strange stuff,' he said, 'it really did have a sort of magic; it seemed, as you drank it, to juggle with time. It gave you a sense of the past as part of the present, in a very odd way. A kind of elixir, not like wine at all, only accidentally like. That may have been all just imagination, but I don't think it was, not *all*.' John Powys continued, as he drank, to praise the wine, it excited him. Theodore drank, looked happy, and said nothing except that it was good.

Dexter was fond of food, but he didn't talk much about it. I have known him moved to some eloquence by oysters but not as he was moved by wine. He could go on and on eating oysters: the most he had ever eaten at a sitting was six and a half dozen. After six dozen he doubted if he really wanted any more, and decided, after two or three minutes' hesitation, that he did. So he ordered another half-dozen and that was exactly enough. It was not too many; but more would have been excess. It rather startled me that this should have happened at Bradford.

Crowley he considers one of the best cooks in the world; there were no meals that he had ever enjoyed more than those that Crowley had cooked for him. Curry was, at Crowley's, the *specialité de la maison*: those curries were astounding. I know, for I have eaten them. They were rather too moving for me, and, I think, for Dexter too, though he ate them with joy for their very excessiveness. Crowley cooked steak with consummate skill and with an ardour that did not burn with that same excess of heat, so, although his curries won the wider fame, his steaks gave the larger sum of pleasure. Those steaks, with a bottle of Richebourg or Corton, are what Dexter remembers most grate-

fully. But his opinion is that Crowley can touch no food that he does not adorn.

I have also heard him praise highly the cooking of several of his women friends, of Jocasta especially; and he would almost passionately commend little Tansy's frying of tame rabbits. These, Dexter said, as she prepared them, were more delicate and more delicious than any chicken. In these later days Tansy lives in the country and keeps livestock. She is a goat-fancier, a pig-fancier, a chicken- and duck- and goose-fancier, as well as a rabbit-fancier. Her rabbits are of varying dispositions. Some are amiable and charming, and these she keeps as pets: others are disagreeable, vicious; and to that kind of rabbit she will observe, as she feeds him, 'You brute, you'll soon be dead!'

Dexter, unlike Sir Andrew Aguecheek, has never been a great eater of meat. He prefers poultry or game, or certain fish, such as sole and salmon trout, but, above all, shell-fish of any kind. Fruit and vegetables he regards as the most indispensable foods, on which he would indeed be well content to live, or fairly well content. Before the Second War, whenever he lunched alone at his flat, he ate nothing but fruit, lettuce, nuts, and cheese. The only war-time deprivation that he felt really keenly was deprivation of fruit.

A peculiarity of Dexter is his distaste for seeing people eat. He never does see them; his expunging of that sight is automatic. I have heard him reply to someone who complained of another as an untidy and repellent eater, 'You shouldn't ever look.' But to see people drink has always given him pleasure.

seemed much happier, much gayer on the second occasion, when he lunched in Dexter's flat. Indeed, on the first occasion, though he abounded in his own good talk and his own wit, he was neither happy nor gay, and it didn't seem that he ever could be either.

The first occasion was at the Athenaeum, also in the afternoon; and though the Athenaeum is a more sobering place than Dexter's flat was, Dexter could not think that that wholly or even partly accounted for the change in Huxley. He was convinced that what accounted for it was Huxley's 'conversion', at that time fairly recent, to his present mystical 'neo-Buddhistic' faith of 'non-attachment', if that is how it can be described. While Dexter was making coffee, Huxley ran out to him in the kitchen with one of Dexter's books in his hand to read aloud from it, with delighted zest, an old ballad. The almost miraculous redemption of Huxley's eyesight had not yet begun, so that was no reason for this change. 'No, no!' said Dexter. 'It was religion. I wish I could get some clearer idea of his God, but I suppose you have to have his scientific mind for that. These Gods! Theodore's brother, John Cowper, breaks God up into little bits, he believes in lots of little gods, nice simple little unpretending "common or garden" gods, some of them. And his brother Llewelyn believed steadfastly in none whatever.'

Dexter counted Theodore Powys and Aleister Crowley as his two most religious friends, 'but Aleister's religion is of course something quite different. His Law of Thelema. He wants to bring us nearer to what he knows as "Godhead". His white magic that everyone thinks is black. Many think so, including "Lord Haw-Haw", with his broadcast gibe about Crowley's "Black Mass in Westminster Abbey".' Crowley's magic had in it, Dexter said, the quality, or motive-force, of Oriental ecstasy: no-one who had seen him when he was under religious inspiration could doubt that. One such occasion, during the Second War, that Dexter

described to me, was when Crowley, after he and Dexter had been lunching with Lady Aberconway, took them back to his rooms in Jermyn Street and read aloud to them from an enormous Magical Book which he supported on his knees. What he read was in a strange language, a language unknown. It was of a singular vibrant beauty and power. Christabel Aberconway sat on the floor by his chair with the unwitting grace and ease possible, in such a position, only to a woman of natural-born and fulfilled beauty. Her lovely eyes were large with an emotion that Dexter shared. 'What is that language?' she asked. 'It is the language of the angels,' Crowley replied. Dexter was impressed, but he could not help reflecting on what an admirable subject the scene would have made for a cartoon by Max Beerbohm. 'Aleister Crowley reciting to Lady Aberconway in the Language of the Angels'.

Dexter, at about that time, tried to get Crowley to tell him what he remembered of his former incarnations. He asked him if it were not a tremendous moment when a former incarnation was first revealed; but Crowley said no, it didn't happen like that, but a fragment of memory would come, generally some insignificant fragment, and other memories would come later, the significant ones appearing imperfectly and obscurely and gradually, often with long intervals between them. When I asked Dexter how far he believed in reincarnation and in all 'psychic phenomena', he made the same reply that he had made to other such questions, he said that human brains—or most of them, anyhow—couldn't be expected to go very far in those directions. 'Generally speaking, we can't affirm or deny. But there *is* evidence,' he said with conviction. 'The question is, can we draw the right conclusions from it? Rarely, if ever, I should think. But here's another great change in the last fifty years, that we've all come round now to Browning's view and the Catholic view of such matters, that "there is something in it, after